



# IQBAL AND ITALY



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Dedicated to  
Prof. Dr. Alessandro Bausani  
fifty years after the publication  
of his Italian translation of  
the *Javed Namah*



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**MUSLIM ITALY**  
**IN**  
**IQBAL'S POETRY\***



In the whole work of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) there is a nostalgia, a longing for the past glory of the Arabs. This longing for the past was for him the beginning of the renaissance of the Indian Muslims with the final creation of Pakistan.

It was this longing that brought Iqbal to see in the Arabs the true spiritual ancestors since the Arabs and Islam had been the bearers of a supranational value, a universal value. When he spoke of *millat*, he did not mean "nation" in our modern sense but the whole world of Islam. This idea which was present all over his work can be better explained if one reads that collection of poems known later under the title of *Bang-i Dara*<sup>1</sup>, i.e. "The Call of the Marching Bell". It is a collection of early poems written in Urdu from 1899 to 1922 even though they were composed mostly till 1912: up to 1908 Iqbal composed chiefly in Urdu, but he did not publish his Urdu collection *Bang-i Dara* until 1924.

This book is important because it is the only one to contain all the subjects Iqbal was interested in: religion, politics, philosophy, action, preaching, even though they are not dealt with in an organic way.

It was in 1905 during his voyage to England that Iqbal saw from his ship in the Mediterranean the island of Sicily and his thoughts went back to the period when Sicily was the seat of a flourishing Arab civilization. The vision of the island inspired him the poem "Siqilliya":

رو لے اب دل کھول کر اے دیدہ خوننا بہ بار  
وہ نظر آتا ہے تہذیب حجازی کا مزار



Now weep blood, oh eyes, for the tomb of the arts  
of Arabia stands there in sight.<sup>2</sup>

His lamentation was not for a world of the past but for the new world then proclaimed by those men of the desert "whose ships had made a playground of ocean once rushed to the fight". Even though he recalled the past glories and asked Sicily to give him her gifts to take to the Indies - "and I who weep here will make others weep there" - Iqbal was concerned with the present situation of Islam.

Through the veil of poetry Iqbal wanted to stir his co-religionists to the action. In the poem "Tarana-i milli" there is in the first lines the explanation of the word *millat*:

چین و عرب ہمارا، ہندوستان ہمارا  
مسلم ہیں ہم، وطن ہے سارا جہاں ہمارا

For Iqbal *vatan* is *sara jahan*, that is the whole world.

China and Arabia are ours, India is ours!  
Muslims we are, our country is the whole universe!

And in the conclusive lines we find also the why of the title *Bang-i Dara*, the call of the marching bell, the signal for the caravan to begin the day's march, which was for Iqbal the trumpet of a re-awakening:

اقبال کا ترانہ بانگ درا ہے گویا  
ہوتا ہے جادہ پیما کا پھر کارواں ہمارا

Iqbal's song seems to be the call of the bell  
Lo, our caravan is moving on again!<sup>3</sup>

In reminding the Muslims of their long forgotten past Iqbal wanted to say that Islam was not only a set of rituals but in essence it was an attitude towards life in general. He saw that his co-religionists were steeped in inaction and were overwhelmed with a sense of frustration. To them he



brought a message of hope by drawing their attention to the glorious deeds of their forefathers.<sup>4</sup>

The longing for the Arab desert-dwellers we have seen in the poem "Sicily" comes again in the end of the long poem "Shikwa" (Complaint). There Hijaz meant the Arab civilization, here Hijaz is the wine and the mode of the Arab culture:

عجمی خم ہے تو کیا، مے تو حجازی ہے مری  
نغمہ ہندی ہے، تو کیا لے تو حجازی ہے مری!

Though the jar was cast in Persia, in Hijaz the wine first flowed;  
And though Indian the song be, from Hijaz derives the mode.<sup>5</sup>

After what I have said Iqbal may appear as an enemy of the western civilization: it is not so. When he published his lectures *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*,<sup>6</sup> in the very beginning he stated that

the most remarkable phenomenon of modern history, however, is the enormous rapidity with which the world of Islam is spiritually moving towards the West.

And added immediately that there was nothing wrong in this because

European culture, on its intellectual side, is only a further development of some of the most important phases of the culture of Islam.

And here I want to call your attention to only one fact: in Iqbal's times nobody knew of the links between Dante's *Comedy* and the Muslim texts except what had been written by Miguel Asin Palacios in his *Escatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia* in 1919. As you probably know, it was in 1949 that Enrico Cerulli published *Il Libro della Scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*,<sup>7</sup> a book in which he reproduced and commented the French and the Latin texts concerning an



Arab *mi'raj* of the Prophet till then unknown to scholars, but texts familiar to the scholars of Dante's times.<sup>8</sup>

Of these aspects was Iqbal thinking when he wrote in his first lecture that

with the re-awakening of Islam it is necessary to examine, in an independent spirit, what Europe has thought and how far the conclusions reached by her can help us in the revision and if necessary, reconstruction, of theological thought in Islam.

In conclusion I find that in the lines scattered here and there in the *Bang-i Dara* there is not a sterile longing for the past glories of Islam; his lamentation may appear such only from a poetical point of view:

تو کبھی اس قوم کی تہذیب کا گہوارہ تھا  
حسن عالم سوز جس کا آتش نظارہ تھا

You who cradled the arts of that nation whose  
Earth-melting lustre once shone like a flame!<sup>9</sup>

The aim of Iqbal's lines is clearly didactic, the whole of his poetry is didactic whether religious or philosophical or political. Such a distinction does not exist in his poetry as in most Oriental poetry. The theory of the "Art for art's sake" was not shared by Iqbal, who considered himself a teacher without a school. His longing for the past meant to invite his co-religionists to open their minds and souls to the message of their own faith and to clear away any misunderstandings might be in their own souls and minds before criticizing the misunderstandings in the souls and minds of the followers of other faiths.



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

\*This paper was read at the International Symposium on *Iqbal in Cordova*, November 21-24, 1991.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, National Book Foundation, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *Bang-i Dara*, p.159.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p.186.

<sup>4</sup> Kabir Chawhury, "Iqbal: An Appreciation", in *Iqbal Review*, Karachi, October 1961, pp.70-82.

<sup>5</sup> *Bang-i Dara*, p.199. See my translation of "Shikwa" and "Jawab-i Shikwa" with introduction and notes "*Protesta*" e "*Risposta alla protesta*" di Muhammad Iqbal. Traduzione dall'urdu con introduzione e note, in "Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale", Napoli, Vol.58, 1998, pp.221-254. These two poems were read at Lahore from the platform of the Anjuman-i Himayat-i Islam in 1909 and 1913. They got immediate success among the modernists because of the message conveyed by the poet, while the orthodoxes objected as it was unconceivable to protest against God. Both the poems were written on specific occasions: the first to shake his co-religionists from their laziness and decline, the second when Bulgaria invaded Turkey. In spite of the fact that the central theme is the decay of Islam from its former greatness (a well-known topic), the dialogue between the poet as spokesman for all the Muslims in the world and God was at that time a new and daring approach to the problem.

<sup>6</sup> Lahore, Sh. M. Ashraf, Reprint 1960, pp.7-8.

<sup>7</sup> Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana: and the later addition in 1972 *Nuove ricerche sul Libro della Scala e la conoscenza dell'Islam in Occidente*. For a comparison between Dante and Iqbal,

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see A. Bausani, "Dante and Iqbal", in *Pakistan Miscellany*, Karachi, Pakistan Publications, 1952, pp.75-83

<sup>8</sup> Vito Salierno, *Dante e l'Islam*, in "Esopo", Milano, N.52, dicembre 1991, pp.28-31.

<sup>9</sup> V. G. Kiernan, *Poems from Iqbal*, London, T. Murray, 1955, p.13; Rept. Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 2003.



2

**MUHAMMAD IQBAL  
AND  
ITALY\***

The first contact of Muhammad Iqbal with Italy was in 1905 during the crossing of the Mediterranean on his voyage from India to England. Seeing the coasts of Sicily from his ship, he composed one of the most touching poems, "Siqilliya", which was later on included in the *Bang-i Dara* published in 1924.

"Siqilliya" is a mournful recollection of the past glories of the island during the Arab period: it appears to Iqbal as the tomb of the Arab civilization. Once, he says, the men of the desert ploughed the waves of the Mediterranean with their fast ships and the whole island re-echoed with their battle-cry *Allah u Akbar*. Now everything weeps in the world of Islam: Sa'adi, the nightingale of Shiraz, weeps for Baghdad destroyed by Hulagu Khan in 1258; Dagh sheds tears for Delhi conquered by the British; Ibn Badrun laments Granada's fall into Christian hands; finally Iqbal himself does the same as he takes back to India a vision of Islamic decay.

It might seem that Iqbal despised the West: it was not so. When he published his lectures, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, he cleared his point of view by saying that the world of Islam was moving towards the West and that European culture, on its intellectual side, was a further development of some phases of Islamic culture.

In order to recall here the ties between the Islamic and the Western worlds and the inscrutable ways of exchanges, influences, interpenetrations, in other words the whole process of osmosis in more than thirteen centuries of



history, it is sufficient to call attention to what took place in Europe in 1919 when the Spanish scholar Miguel Asin Palacios surprised and provoked the western world, and Italy in particular, with the publication of his inflammatory book *Escatologia musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. In this work the Spanish scholar described the analogies existing between the construction of the celestial world in Dante's *Commedia* and the Muslim eschatology: to support his theory he quoted comparisons between episodes in the *Commedia* and passages taken from Arabic literature. At the time his claim was countered by saying that Dante did not know Arabic and that the works of Arabic literature to which Asin Palacios referred had not been translated into any European languages in Dante's times. Actually these counter-theories were more the result of factiousness than of a critical approach, at least as far as many scholars interested in the problem were concerned. It was an alliance of scholars who seemed to believe that Dante's fame would be diminished by his knowledge or use of Islamic texts and not, on the contrary, increased.

Thirty years after, in 1949, the Italian Orientalist Enrico Cerulli published *Il Libro della Scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*. In the first part he published the French and Latin texts concerning a celestial voyage of the Prophet and His vision of the skies and of hell; in the second, the unknown texts of medieval authors containing information on the Muslim traditions about eschatology. The purpose of this second part was to consider how much the western world knew about the Muslim ideas about Paradise and Hell, independently from the *Libro della Scala* (its original Arabic title was *al-Mi'raj*), which was a Latin and a French translation from the Castilian, the latter derived from an Arabic text.

Did Iqbal think of these aspects of the osmosis between Islam and the West when he wrote his lectures, in particular the lecture "Knowledge and Religious Experience"? We think so if one examines the whole lecture carefully.

Let us go back to the poem "Siqilliya": though the vision of the island is a literary recollection, it contains Iqbal's considerations on the then political situation of Indian Muslims, which was the key subject of Iqbal's presidential speech in the Lahore session of the All Indian Muslim Conference on 21-22 March 1932. In that speech, famous for the idea of creating two separate areas in India for Hindus and Muslims, there is a significant passage in which Iqbal quoted Mussolini, certainly a linguistic and formal quotation, which however is not without evidence of attraction towards Mussolini, even though on a personal level and not on the level of the ideas:

Concentrate your ego on yourself alone, and ripen your clay into real manhood, if you wish to see your aspirations realized. Mussolini's maxim was "He who has steel has bread", I venture to modify it a bit and say "He who is steel has everything". Be hard and work hard. This is the whole secret of individual and collective life. Our ideal is well defined. It is to win, in the coming constitution, a position for Islam which may bring her opportunities to fulfil her destiny in this Country.<sup>1</sup>

The previous year, in 1931, Iqbal had been to England as a Member of the Indian Delegation to the Second Round Table Conference. On his way back home he had stopped for a few days in Rome on an official invitation from the Accademia d'Italia. Generally all the visits of prominent men from India were officially organized by the Accademia d'Italia with the consent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which did not want to appear in the forefront for political reasons; practically the invitations came from the Government, i.e. from Mussolini himself.

On 27 November, at 15.45, the Poet was received by Mussolini at Palazzo Venezia.<sup>2</sup> The news of the visit was



not published in newspapers; the only news was a short notice in the monthly magazine "Oriente Moderno", saying that Muhammad Iqbal had delivered a lecture on 27 November at the Accademia d'Italia on an ethical and religious subject. Evidently the Italian government did not want to publicize the visit of a Muslim personality in order not to create difficulties with Great Britain in a period of apparent *détente*.

The purpose of the visit is unknown. A courtesy call? Yes, but with a double interest: a personal admiration for the man by Iqbal, a political interest by Mussolini, who, as we know from other sources, was trying to develop his own personal policy towards India.

Iqbal was certainly impressed by the personality of Mussolini, without of course subscribing to the cult of Fascism: Italy made no secret of her anglophobia. Back in Lahore Iqbal wrote, some time after, two poems on Mussolini, which were published in 1935-1936. The first appeared in the *Bal-i Jibril* in January 1935: it was written before the Abyssinian war. It is favourable to Mussolini whom Iqbal saw as a new force, able to reawaken "the splendour of life in the eyes of the old and the burning desire in the hearts of the young"

چشم پیران کہن میں زندگی کا فروغ  
نوجوان تیرے ہیں سوز آرزو سے سینہ تاب

He closed this poem by saying that "the guitar was just waiting for the artist's touch":

زخمہ ور کا منتظر تھا تیری فطرت کا رباب  
فیض یہ کس کی نظر کا ہے، کرامت کس کی ہے؟  
وہ کہ ہے جس کی نگہ مثل شعاع آفتاب

The second poem was written in the Shish Mahal of Bhopal on 22 August 1935: it appeared in the *Zarb-i Kalim* in July 1936. Was there a change in Iqbal's mind between the writing of the poem and the time of its publication after the Abyssinian campaign and the proclamation of the Italian empire on 9 May 1936? Apparently, there was. The sub-title "*Apne mashriqi aur maghribi harifun se*" (to his rivals east and west) announces Mussolini's self-defence against the British who had not accepted the Ethiopian campaign. Mussolini lists all the crimes and outrages of the British which had been justified under the veil of civilization and gives a justification of his crimes

پردہ تہذیب میں غارت گری، آدم کشی  
کل روا رکھی تھی تم نے، میں روا رکھتا ہوں آج

Under the pretext of civilization pillage and murder  
Yesterday you did, today I do.

These verses might appear as a defence of Mussolini by Iqbal, actually it is a criticism and a denunciation of the colonial and imperialistic policy disguised under the cloak of civilization in a cunning Machiavellian way. Four days before this poem Iqbal had written a poem on Abyssinia: the first two lines are very significant:

یورپ کے کرگسوں کو نہیں ہے ابھی خبر  
ہے کتنی زہرناک ابی سینیا کی لاش

The vultures of Europe do not realize  
how poisonous is the carcass of Abyssinia<sup>3</sup>

We have said that we do not know anything on the meeting between Mussolini and Iqbal; as a matter of fact we were not even sure that a meeting had taken place. There was only a statement by the Italian diplomatist Pietro Quaroni<sup>4</sup> who had met Iqbal in Lahore in 1936 and the recollections of Iqbal's son, Javed. Now we know for



certain that Iqbal was received by Mussolini in the afternoon of Friday, 27 November 1931. In what language was their conversation? Mussolini was not able to follow a conversation in English; Iqbal did not know Italian. And we do not think that the conversation was a long one as it was scheduled for a span of only ten minutes. Fortunately we know Iqbal's thoughts from his long conversation in Lahore with the Italian diplomatist Quaroni.

In 1936, while travelling from Rome to Afghanistan where he was posted as Minister Plenipotentiary of Italy at the head of the Italian Legation in Kabul, Pietro Quaroni met at Athens with his colleague Gino Scarpa, who gave him letters of introduction for some of his Indian friends. One of these letters was for Muhammad Iqbal.

After reaching Bombay, Pietro Quaroni left by train for Lahore in order to proceed to Kabul. In Lahore he put up at the Faletti Hotel where the hotel porter offered to take the letter to destination.

Iqbal accepted to meet the Italian diplomatist, who related his conversation with the Poet twenty years later in the most widely-circulated Italian newspaper "*Corriere della Sera*".

Here is Quaroni's description of the meeting:

It was a small, irregular room, with a low ceiling: a small sofa was along the wall. Iqbal was sitting on the ground on a couple of cushions, a green glass *huqqa* near him. He held an amber and red-velvet mouth-piece in his hand and inhaled every now and then some puffs, as if absent-minded.

His face was thin, pale, very white as if drawn; I was told he had been ill.

Before Islam we were a family of brahmans in Kashmir - were his first words. His nose was aquiline, prominent, and sharp, his moustache thin and lightly grey, his fingers tapering and nervous.

His head was slightly bent, his voice was slow, weary, clear, it seemed as if every word was to be thrust into your head. Every now and then he showed a light smile, the upper lip on one side of his face, one of his eyebrows slightly up behind his eyelid. In his smile however there was hidden the confidence of his intellectual superiority, and perhaps a deep irony, sometime a little hostile.

I had met many Muslims, in Turkey, in Albania, in the Middle East, most of them conservative, perhaps attached to their religion more formally than substantially, their attitude was self-defensive. This time it was different: in front of me there was a thinker, a reformer, a prophet, perhaps a follower of a renewed Islam, surely conscious of its strength and its will.

Of course, we spoke of the position of Italy with regard to Islam. It was the time of the first theories about the sword of Islam and the defender of Islam. It was not easy to explain our ideas which were too vague. Besides it was not easy to speak to Muhammad Iqbal: he spoke no word, he looked at me through his half-closed eyelids, he bent towards me as if to listen to me in a better way, but I perceived his refusal. I was trying to guess his hardness, if there was any.

Suddenly he asked me: "When are you going to build a mosque in Rome?"

I tried to explain, but it was even less easy than before.

"Well, why do you send your missionaries to our country? Why do you compel us to accept your churches? You are catholics, you think that your religion is the only true one, you try to convert us. It is your right. I too am convinced that my religion is the only true one and try to convert those who do not believe in it. But if you want to be friends or protectors of Islam, if you want us to trust you, then you must begin by respecting us, and demonstrating that you think our religion is as good as yours. And then, logically, you should stop sending your missionaries, and there are no reasons why a beautiful mosque should not be built in Rome, precisely in Rome. We too know and appreciate logic, the same logic of yours, the Aristotelian logic, do not forget it".

Impossible to say that he was wrong. I tried to change the subject unsuccessfully, the conversation was always political.

It was 1936 and the proclamation of the Italian empire was a recent event. It was not the easiest thing to defend our campaign in the eyes of people who were struggling to get free of a foreign domination. It is



strange how many subjects look excellent when one thinks of them at a table and sound useless when one is in front of human beings.

“You understand what I say when I speak of Rum” - he asked.

He had turned to me: there was something ironical deliberately while he stroke his thin moustache.

Literally Rum is Rome, generally the Roman empire, in particular the Byzantine empire, in a certain sense of the word it meant the organized christianity of the epoch of the crusades.

“Well, can you explain to me why Italy wants to become Rum again? If Italy is Italy, though a catholic country, there are no reasons not to get on well. But if Italy wants to become Rum again, then it is better not to cherish false hopes: the whole world of Islam will be against her, just as at the time of the old Rum”.

Was it a warning, a threat? I do not know. His tone was very kind, his voice calm and peaceful: there was in the deep of his eyes a kind light, but there was in the tone of his voice something hard, almost unmerciful.

“We want to get rid of the British - went on Iqbal as if following his thoughts - but not to put someone else in their place. As a matter of fact, to tell the truth, we prefer to get our freedom by ourselves”.

Actually the matter was very delicate. I could not say whether it was me or my host to shift our conversation on the less burning subject of the mystics of Islam. Muhammad Iqbal went on speaking with his same calm voice, with his slightly ironical tone.

[...]

“Do you know I have written a poem on Mussolini? - he told me with a faint smile when I was about to take leave - I will send it to you tomorrow”.

The next day three of his followers came to see me at the hotel: they delivered me, on the open palms of their hands, as if in a ceremony, a bound book of Iqbal's poems. And they spoke to me about him: there was a kind of excitement in their words. How did that man, apparently cold, indifferent, ironical, excite so much enthusiasm? Or did he use a mask in front of a stranger?

The book was in Urdu, and this was not an easy problem for me. I asked my young friends to translate what concerned Mussolini. They

tried to hide their embarrassment, then one of them glanced through the book, looked at me, and began translating.

It was written, I think, after Muhammad Iqbal had been received by Mussolini at Palazzo Venezia [in Rome]. I wondered whether a full translation had ever been sent to Mussolini.<sup>5</sup>

This is the essential part of Quaroni's article, from which we have been able to know Iqbal's views on a burning problem. Today we know from other sources that according to a logical but disarming axiom Mussolini had thought of an Italian policy in the Indian sub-continent, or better of his personal policy towards India. His axiom looked apparently simple: India and Italy are anti-British, hence India and Italy should get on well. This was the heart of the problem even though it was not so simple.

Actually there was not a clear policy of fascist Italy towards British India. The Italian policy was always unprepared and subject to the availability or willingness of those Italians or Indians who were actually or apparently ready to cooperate according to their own interests or their personal vision of the problem. Even top officials such as Galeazzo Ciano<sup>6</sup> or Dino Grandi<sup>7</sup> did not have a unified vision: their ideas were subject to their personal preferences and to their attitudes regarding England before the second world war and Germany from 1940 onwards.

Mussolini's idea was to exploit India from the cultural and economical point of view and to occupy some strongholds after the victory of the Axis and the collapse of the Indian Empire. A proof of this idea is a sentence he had read and underlined in a book about Yugoslav unity:

India is the strong-room of the world. Italy must have it. What the British say is of no importance. The fascist comrades will see them silenced....<sup>8</sup>

This book was printed in 1931. When did Mussolini read the just quoted passage? Perhaps in the same year. We



think so because in his library there was an essay written by Gino Scarpa<sup>9</sup> under the pseudonym of "Viator" with the title *L'India dove va?* (Where does India go?) and published in Rome by the Libreria del Littorio, a fascist government press.

The introduction to the book was written by someone belonging to a restricted circle of fascist officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After describing the political situation of India and the beginning of the Indian struggle for independence, the unknown writer said that Britain was responsible for the position of the peoples of Asia regarding Europe, which was not compelled to support Britain's policy. The British empire was not a European creation or a defence of Europe: it was based on England only, perhaps hostile to Europe. The conclusion was that Rome could become a mediator and get advantages, thus becoming the fulcrum of the international balance. The final words were very significant: "The Eastern Mediterranean will go back to its historical function of the past, Rome is the place where East and West shall meet again".

In his library Mussolini had many other books on India which are further evidence of his interest in the Indian problem. Moreover, in 1935, he created the IsMEO, an Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, which was officially an institution for cultural purposes, but actually for the development of economic relations mainly with India (the name of the Institute was vague in order to divert British suspicions or to avoid their protests at interference).

Some further considerations on Mussolini's plan towards India. In the late Twenties and in the Thirties Mussolini agreed to send to India the most important pro-fascist Italian journalists with the task of collecting first-hand information and of making propaganda for the fascist regime.<sup>10</sup> One of them, Mario Appellius, a pro-fascist

journalist, wrote a book *India*, which was published in Milan in 1925. According to him Britain had failed in her task of civilizing India because of "the incontestable inferiority of the Anglo-Saxons in front of Rome". It was a silly and distasteful statement, but I think it was said in order to imply that Rome could do better.

On a cultural level the tactical manoeuvre was assigned to two well-known scholars of Sanskrit and Indian literatures, the professors Carlo Formichi<sup>11</sup> and Giuseppe Tucci.<sup>12</sup> Their task was to invite Tagore to Italy in 1926 and to organize the poet's visit. This is not the place to describe in details Tagore's visit to Italy.<sup>13</sup> It is enough to say that Tagore's critical attitude to the Italian government, which he expressed after leaving Italy, had created a hostile impression in the Italian press and a sort of ostracism of him personally, even though four years later Tagore sent to Mussolini a letter from New York on 21 November 1930 in which he said: "...I earnestly hope that the misunderstanding which has unfortunately caused a barrier between me and the great people you represent, the people for whom I have genuine love, will not remain permanent".<sup>14</sup>

This was more or less the climate in which Gandhi's short visit to Italy took place in December 1931. He was received by Mussolini at Palazzo Venezia on 12 December 1931, exactly two weeks after Iqbal. Gino Scarpa, who was then Consul General in Calcutta, accompanied Gandhi on a visit to the town and to some fascist institutions. It happened that a false interview with Gandhi was published on 15 December by the Editor-in-Chief of the daily paper "Giornale d'Italia", Virgino Gayda. The truth is that Gandhi did not agree to any interview: it was Gayda who had pieced one together by using words said by Gandhi here and there during his visit to Roman cultural places, etc.<sup>15</sup> It is important to mention here that Gandhi's autobiography,



which had appeared in London in 1930 under the title of *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story*, edited by C. F. Andrews, was immediately translated into Italian and published in Milan in 1931 with a preface by Giovanni Gentile, the philosopher and ideologist of the regime, who, in a lecture in 1935, stated that "Italy is present almost everywhere in the East where people see in Rome one of the principal elements of world policy".<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, since September 1935 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been trying to contact Nehru, who after Gandhi's temporary retirement from politics had become the actual leader of the nationalist movement. But, after the previous experiences of people utilized for fascist propaganda against their wishes and sometimes even without their knowledge, Nehru declined Mussolini's invitation while passing through Rome in the early days of March 1936, because "the Abyssinian campaign was being carried on - wrote Nehru - and my meeting him would inevitably lead to all manner of inferences, and was bound to be used for fascist propaganda".<sup>17</sup>

In conclusion, Tagore, Iqbal and Gandhi were interested in meeting Mussolini on a personal level because all of them wanted to have an idea of the personality of the Italian dictator. However they did not realize that whatever they said or did was always distorted and altered in the press in order to present them as supporters of the fascist regime rather than men interested in the Italian affairs from a cultural point of view.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

\*Revised edition of a paper read at the International Symposium on *Iqbal and Modern Era*, Gent, November 18-19, 1997. The original paper was published by M. Ikram Chaghatai, *Iqbal New Dimensions*, Lahore, Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2003, pp.615-623.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from S. A. Vahid, *Introduction to Iqbal*, Karachi, Pakistan Publications, no date [1960?], p.47.

<sup>2</sup> In the Visitors' Book of Friday, 27 November 1931, one can read: "Time 15.45. Sir Mohamed [sic] Iqbal, great Muslim Poet". See "Segreteria particolare del Duce, Carteggio Ordinario, Udienze b.3107". I had discussed this problem with Dr. Saeed A. Durrani, Chairman of the Iqbal Academy, Great Britain, in a meeting in Milan: he had asked me to do some research in the State Archives in Rome and I was successful in finding the original Visitors' Book, Mussolini's Private Secretariat. My thanks go to Dr. Saeed A. Durrani, and to the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma.

<sup>3</sup> "Abyssinia" in the *Zarb-i Kalim*, in *Kulliyat-i Iqbal*, already quoted, p.657.

<sup>4</sup> Pietro Quaroni (Rome 1898-1971), entered the diplomatic service in 1920, Minister plenipotentiary in Kabul from 1936 to 1944, Ambassador to Moscow, Paris, and Bonn, Chairman of Radio & Television from 1965 to 1969.

<sup>5</sup> Pietro Quaroni, *Ricordi di un ambasciatore. Un poeta difficile*, in "Corriere della Sera", Milan, 11 February 1956, re-printed in *Il mondo di un ambasciatore*, Milano, Ferro Edizioni, 1965, pp.106-112.

<sup>6</sup> Galeazzo Ciano (Livorno 1903-Verona 1944), entered the diplomatic service in 1925, married Mussolini's daughter Edda in 1930, Under-Secretary for Press and Propaganda in 1934-1935, Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1936, a position he left on 5 February 1943. In the historical meeting of the "Gran Consiglio del Fascismo" on 25 July 1943 he voted in favour of Dino Grandi's Order of the Day against Mussolini. He was tried for high treason in front of a special tribunal of the "Repubblica



Sociale Italiana" in Verona, sentenced to death and shot on 11 January 1944.

<sup>7</sup> Dino Grandi (Mordano, Bologna 1895-Bologna 1988), Under-Secretary for the Interior in 1924-1925, and for Foreign Affairs in 1929-1932, Ambassador to London from 1932 to 1939, Minister for Justice from 1939 to 1943. With his Order of the Day of 25 July 1943 he caused Mussolini's fall: he was sentenced to death by default in 1944. He returned to Italy after the war and was granted an amnesty.

<sup>8</sup> "Les Indes sont bien le coffre-fort du monde. Il faut que l'Italie les possède. Peu leur importe ce que les Anglais diront. Les légionnaires fascistes se chargeraient de les faire taire ...", in Krsta Chantitch-Chandan, *L'unité yougoslave et le roi Alexandre I*, Paris, P. Bossuet, 1931; quoted by Loretta De Felice, *Un fondo bibliografico, d'interesse documentario, conservato nell'Archivio Centrale dello Stato. La "Collezione Mussolini"*, in "Storia Contemporanea", XIV, N.3, giugno 1983, pp.489. The best work on Mussolini's attitude towards India is by Renzo De Felice, *Il Fascismo e l'Oriente. Arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1988, in particular the third chapter devoted completely to India, pp.187-241.

<sup>9</sup> Gino Scarpa, a man close to Mussolini, had been to India from 1923 onwards: he was Consul General in Calcutta in the years 1929-1933.

<sup>10</sup> Mario Prayer, *Gandhi e il nazionalismo indiano nella pubblicistica del regime fascista 1912-1938*, in "Storia Contemporanea", XIX, N.1, febbraio 1988, pp.55-83.

<sup>11</sup> Carlo Formichi (Naples 1871-Rome 1943), Professor of Sanskrit in the Universities of Bologna, Pisa, and Rome, member of the Italian Academy in 1929, and later on Vice-President of it.

<sup>12</sup> Giuseppe Tucci (Macerata 1894-Rome 1984), Professor of Indian Religions and Philosophies in the University of Rome, Member of the Italian Academy in 1929, President of the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East, Rome, from 1948 to 1979. From 1925 to 1930 he taught Italian, Chinese, and Tibetan languages in the Universities of Shantiniketan and Calcutta.

<sup>13</sup> Vito Saliermo, *Tagore e il fascismo. Mussolini e la politica italiana verso l'India*, in "Nuova Storia Contemporanea", II, N.5, settembre-ottobre 1998, pp.63-80.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp.79-80. The passage I have quoted was personally underlined by Mussolini in the Italian translation of the letter made by the Press Office, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Presidenza del Consiglio, Fasc.20/15, N.13238.

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<sup>15</sup> Gandhi was received by Mussolini on 12 December 1931, at 6 p.m.: the visit lasted twenty minutes. See Gianni Sofri, *Gandhi in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1988.

<sup>16</sup> Giovanni Gentile (Castelvetrano, Trapani 1875-Florence 1944), philosopher and politician, Director of the "Enciclopedia Italiana", President of the Italian Academy 1943-1944.

<sup>17</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, Calcutta, The Signet Press, 1946, p.28.



3

**IQBAL STUDIES  
IN  
ITALY\***

The interest of modern Islamic studies in Italy began with Michele Amari (1806-1889) and his major work *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, which was published in three volumes between 1854 and 1872. In spite of the fact that his idea of Islam was tremendously modern, times were not ripe and his work did not receive much attention except among scholars and clever students. With great insight Michele Amari wrote in the beginning of his first volume:

Islam is a political and religious system remarkable for both the vastity and simplicity of its tenets, and which perfectly stood the proof of history, because it regenerated a nation more swiftly than any other religious law and contributed remarkably to the civilization of a great part of mankind, yet it is still alive and does not seem ready to die.<sup>1</sup>

In the same period Michele Amari began to collect materials regarding Arabic sources on Sicily in the original Arabic text with scholarly notes which were published in Germany in 1857. In the late Eighties he was able to publish an Italian translation which was a great help for the future scholars of Islam.<sup>2</sup>

The next great personality of Islamic studies was Prince Leone Caetani (1869-1935), a descendant of Pope Benedetto Caetani known as Boniface VIII, the great enemy of Dante (*Inferno*, XIX). After travelling extensively in the Mediterranean Eastern countries Leone Caetani devised the ambitious project of a vast history of Islamic peoples from the foundation of Islam until the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. Between 1905 and 1926 he published ten volumes of his *Annali dell'Islam*<sup>3</sup> concerning the first forty Hijra years. Realizing that his project was impossible to be

achieved by a single person, he published a *Chronographia islamica*,<sup>4</sup> comprising annalistic materials from the beginning of Islam up to 144H (762 A.D.) in an abridged form.

Incidentally Caetani's work, which was written in Italian, a language accessible to only a few scholars, was considered so much important that in 1962 the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Karachi, then directed by Professor Fazlur Rahman, signed an agreement with Professor Giuseppe Tucci, President of the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East in Rome (IsMEO) for an English translation of Caetani's work. I myself, then Director of the Italian Institute in Karachi and lecturer at the University, started translating the first volume of the *Annals of Islam*. In 1964 my assignment in Pakistan ended and unfortunately no one replaced me. The result was a permanent stop to the project; today I express here the wish that the project may be resumed by other young scholars.

The works of Michele Amari and Leone Caetani paved the way for sectorial studies in the history of Islam and in the field of literatures in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu.

In 1921 there appeared in Rome a monthly magazine called "Oriente Moderno" with the primarily aim to keep Italian readers informed and aware of the up-to-date news in the Muslim world. Besides this, the magazine contained a politico-cultural section in which articles about Iqbal appeared even before the birth of Pakistan.

The first record of Iqbal's activity appeared in the above mentioned magazine in 1922-1923 in a note by Carlo Alfonso Nallino who wrote that Iqbal's "philosophical Persian poem *Asrar-i Khudi* [...] is actually a cry of Muslim revolt against Europe, a demonstration of the strongest aspirations of Pan-Islamic irredentism".<sup>5</sup>



A year before, this aspect had been emphasized by A. Bonucci<sup>6</sup> while reviewing Nicholson's English translation *Secrets of the Self* published by Macmillan in 1920.

In 1932, as every scholar knows, Muhammad Iqbal published at Lahore his *Javed Namah*. In the same year, in December, Maria Nallino published an article<sup>7</sup> giving the summary of Iqbal's poem. Actually it was not an original article since no Italian scholar was able to read and understand the poem in a short time. It was the translation of an unsigned article in English<sup>8</sup> with original notes by the same Maria Nallino: it is interesting to note that in the title of the Italian article the *Javed Namah* was called a *Divine Comedy*.

This particular interest of the board of the magazine "Oriente Moderno" for Iqbal's work in the Thirties of last century derived from two relevant elements. The first was that Italy had always viewed sympathetically the problems of the Muslims in India, the second was Iqbal's meeting with Mussolini.

In 1934, the year in which Iqbal published in London his lectures aimed at a reconstruction of the Muslim religious philosophy,<sup>9</sup> "Oriente Moderno" published an article by Arthur Jeffery, a professor in the American University of Cairo. It was a wide critical review which however had only the merit of informing the Italian readers on the role of the Qur'an in modern times.<sup>10</sup>

With the outbreak of the Second World War the magazine "Oriente Moderno" increased its propagandistic role though it maintained its cultural purpose. An Indian Muslim student, who got a degree in Italian literature in Rome, Reyaz ul-Hasan, - incidentally I used to meet him in Karachi in the 1960s when he worked as Vice-Director of the "Morning News" was given the task of writing in 1941

a long article on the life and work of Iqbal.<sup>11</sup> It was a very interesting and illuminating article because it was the first to be written in original Italian with direct translations from the *Bang-i Dara*, *Payam-i Mashriq*, *Asrar-i Khudi*, *Zabur-i 'Ajam*, and *Bal-i Jibril*.

In the same period Virginia Vacca, an Arabist, published for the Institute of International Politics of Milan a useful and informative handbook dealing with the history of Muslim India: three pages were devoted to Iqbal.<sup>12</sup> Although in those years, because of the war, access to original sources was almost impossible, the authoress made such a good job of her handbook, that it is still in use to-day for students and scholars of oriental history.

The open mindedness of the Vatican newspaper "L'Osservatore Romano" is demonstrated in 1941 by publishing an Italian translation of Iqbal's poem "Siqilliya",<sup>13</sup> which was later on published in a new version by Alessandro Bausani in 1957 and again by me in 1993.

It was only to be expected that, with the birth of Pakistan, Italian scholars and publishers began to take more interest in the culture of Muslim India.

The first scholar in Italy and one of the first in the world, outside Pakistan, to study Iqbal's work from a critical point of view, was Professor Alessandro Bausani (1921-1988) from the Universities of Naples and Rome.

In the 1950s he devoted full-time to the study of Iqbal's work, in particular the *Javed Namah*, which he considered Iqbal's *magnum opus* for the implication with Dante's *Divina Commedia* and the problem of Muslim sources. A proof of this interest were his articles published in the quarterlies *East and West*, Rome, and the *Pakistan Quarterly*, Karachi, dealing with Dante and Iqbal.<sup>14</sup>

The Italian translation of the *Javed Namah*, the first in a foreign language, appeared in 1952.<sup>15</sup> It was printed in a very limited number of copies to be circulated among students and scholars, probably in view of putting feelers out. The attempt was successful and the *Javed Namah* was published in a revised edition in 1965 in a series of books devoted to the writers of the East.<sup>16</sup> In his introduction Alessandro Bausani pointed out the fact that Iqbal was more influenced by Goethe's work than Dante's and Milton's: "There is in it an old muslim tradition of *mi'raj* which, according to recent studies, is supposed to be at the origins of our *Divina Commedia*, plus a direct knowledge of Dante and Goethe (through English translations)"<sup>17</sup>.

In the same period Alessandro Bausani wrote a scientific and critical essay which being written in English had a wide circulation. It dealt with *The Concept of Time in the religious philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal*.<sup>18</sup> According to Bausani the object of his paper was "to analyse and describe one of the leitmotifs of Iqbal's religious philosophy, the concept of Time, freeing it from purely poetical imagery and the more or less unnatural ties with what Iqbal believed to be the strict tradition of Islam" (p.159). In doing so Bausani stated that "we must be willing to accept Iqbal's philosophy on the same basis, at the start, as any other European system, not as a matter of curiosity for scholars" (p.159). In fact, in the right beginning of his paper, Bausani wanted to clear the mind of prejudice by saying that on the hand of Easterners Iqbal is hailed as an almost infallible prophet and master, while on the hand of Westerners he is studied with no real living participation, just as an aspect of the revival of Muslim peoples, "a phenomenon to be scientifically analysed, even in a sympathetic spirit, but never to be felt and accepted on a par with similar schools of thought in Europe". Actually



this defect, he said, was apparently in papers like that by Arthur Jeffery, quoted before.<sup>19</sup>

Other two important essays were written by Bausani in Italian.

In 1955 he wrote a very remarkable and exhaustive essay on the figure of Satan in Iqbal's philosophical and poetical work.<sup>20</sup> In the first part of his essay Bausani translated into Italian passages from the *Payam-i Mashriq* concerning Adam's birth, Satan's refusal, Adam's temptation, Adam leaving Paradise, Adam in the presence of God, relevant parts from the *Javed Namah*, the "Dialogue between Gabriel and Satan" from the *Bal-i Jibril*, the "Dialogue between God and Satan" and "Satan to his Political

Offspring" from the *Zarb-i Kalim*, and "Satan's Parliament" from the *Armughan-i Hijaz*. The final conclusions are that five elements are to be found in Iqbal's poetical Satan: 1 - The Greek element of "Prometheus", of action and "technique" as *ùbris* through Milton's work. 2 - The old-Jewish element and the genuine-Islamic element of Satan seen as God's instrument. 3 - The Christian gnostic element of Satan as an evil and positive power deriving from ancient Iran. 4 - An Iqbal's personal development of the concept that in the Jewish-Islamic God there is an element of what Christian religion calls "Satanic". 5 - A further pragmatic-political development of Satan as "opium of the peoples". Bausani concludes that Iqbal was "one of the few who had studied and known thoroughly the European thought".<sup>21</sup>

In 1958 Bausani translated into Italian a work never translated into a European language before: Iqbal's *Gulshan-i raz-i jadid*.<sup>22</sup> Actually an English translation had been made by B. A. Dar in 1957,<sup>23</sup> but Bausani had started his work autonomously though he had the possibility to

read B. A. Dar's translation before publishing his own translation. The work, which is considered an answer to Mahmud Shabistari's homonymous poem, was appreciated by Alessandro Bausani for the typical characteristic of Iqbal's thought and art, that is a blending of new ideas and traditional forms. Along with the Italian translation Bausani made an original work by listing all the most important terms used by Iqbal with an explanation of the same and the quotation of the relevant verses. Allow me to quote only an example. The word *bazm* (vv.318-319) = "banquet", traditionally used to indicate "crowd, warmth of society, etc." here means that "God's banquet is cold and useless without the presence of man. "God needs men" is a concept which Iqbal uses in a very artistic way in a poem in the *Zabur-i 'Ajam* beginning with "God has lost us, yet He is still searching for us".<sup>24</sup> Finally, in 1960, Professor Bausani examined the classical elements of Muslim philosophy present in Iqbal's work.<sup>25</sup>

We have to add that Bausani's *Il Poema Celeste* published in the 1960 edition and quoted before, contained also translations from the *Payam-i Mashriq*, the *Bang-i Dara*, the *Zabur-i 'Ajam*, the *Bal-i Jibril*, the *Zarb-i Kalim*, and the *Armughan-i Hijaz*. Actually it was the only book devoted to Iqbal, which had a good success among the general readers. It is now out of print and has not been unfortunately replaced by any other book because publishers are not ready to run the risk of printing a book that does not have any chance of a good sale according to market standard.

In the end there remains to speak of my own work. In spite of the fact that it is always embarrassing to speak of such a thing, I limit myself to a pure information.

The only article of mine, which had a large circulation as it was published in a monthly magazine devoted to poetry,

“Poesia”, still published and sold in bookstalls, concerned an appreciation of Iqbal’s work in Urdu along with translations from the trilogy of *Bang-i Dara*, *Bal-i Jibril*, and *Zarb-i Kalim*.<sup>26</sup>

Besides three general articles on Iqbal,<sup>27</sup> I published in the “Annali” of the Oriental University in Naples a translation from Urdu into Italian of Iqbal’s “Shikwa aur Jawab-i Shikwa” with a wide introduction to the two poems and relevant notes.<sup>28</sup>



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

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